

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO ALL AFRICAN DIPLOMATIC POSTS

AMCONSUL LUANDA

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL LUANDA

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 074346

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO LONDON LUSAKA

DAR ES SALAAM NAIROBI PRETORIA PARIS ADDIS ABABA

GABORONE LAGOS DURBAN JOHANNESBURG USUN NEW YORK

FROM CAPETOWN APR 2

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 0373

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SF

SUBJECT: LAIRD SAYS US REASSESSING ARMS EMBARGO ON SOUTH
AFRICA

1. EMBASSY PRETORIA IS REPORTING SEPARATELY DETAILS OF FRONT-PAGE
BANNER HEADLINE STORY IN RAND DAILY MAIL TODAY WHICH SAYS FORMER
US DEFENSE SECRETARY MELVYN LAIRD HAS STATED THAT "AS A RESULT OF
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SOUTH AFRICA'S DETENTE POLICY, THE US WAS REASSESSING ITS EMBARGO

ON ARMS FOR SOUTH AFRICA." STATEMENT WAS MADE IN APRIL FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE APPARENTLY CALLED BY LAIRD, WHO IS VISITING SA IN CONNECTION WITH HIS ASSOCIATION WITH READER'S DIGEST. SIMILAR BUT MUCH BRIEFER STORY ON LOWER FRONT PAGE OF CAPE TIMES TODAY, HEADLINED "RETHINK ON ARMS EMBARGO ON SA." ADDS THAT LAIRD STATED AFRICA'S MOVES TOWARDS DETENTE HAVE "OPENED UP BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATION" BETWEEN THE US AND SOUTH AFRICA.

2. LAIRD'S COMMENTS ARE BOUND TO RESURRECT BELIEF IN SOME CIRCLES THAT US POLICY IS "TILTING" IN FAVOR OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA. CERTAINLY SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS, AND PROBABLY SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT, WILL GIVE FULL PLAY TO THIS THEME, AS THEY HAVE ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS. BECAUSE OF THIS, AND ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF CLOSE ATTENTION WHICH OTHER AFRICAN STATES AND MANY AFRICANS IN SA GIVE TO STORIES ABOUT US POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA, WE BELIEVE IT IMPERATIVE THAT USG REFUTE LAIRD'S STATEMENT ABOUT ARMS EMBARGO, UNLESS THERE IS IN FACT SOME TRUTH TO IT. FAILURE DIRECTLY TO REFUTE STATEMENT OF THIS KIND AND OFFSET THE INEVITABLE EXAGGERATIONS AND ELABORATIONS BY SA PRESS WOULD REINFORCE SOUTH AFRICAN AND OTHER AFRICAN DISINCLINATION TO BELIEVE OTHER US STATEMENTS TO CONTRARY AND PROVIDE GRIST FOR RADICAL AFRICAN PROPAGANDISTS WHO REPEATEDLY ACCUSE USG OF SECRET COLLUSION WITH SAG.

3. IF OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CONTINUING US POLICY ARE CORRECT, REQUEST DEPARTMENT IMMEDIATELY AUTHORIZE EMBASSY TO ISSUE PRESS STATEMENT NOTING THAT MR. LAIRD WAS SPEAKING AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN AND NOT FOR THE USG; AND THAT WHILE POLICY EVALUATION IS A NEVERENDING PROCESS WITHIN THE USG, NO SPECIFIC "REASSESSMENT" IS BEING MADE OF THE ARMS EMBARGO AND THERE IS CURRENTLY NO LIKELIHOOD OF ANY CHANGE IN US ARMS POLICY.

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UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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